News Release

UDOH Receives Grant to Improve
the Exchange of Electronic Health Information

Utah project is part of a national effort to address privacy and security issues

(Salt Lake City, Utah) – The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) has been awarded $345,000 to address privacy and security issues affecting the exchange of electronic health information. Known as eHealth, the secure sharing of health information electronically is safer for patients, improves patient care and should reduce health care costs.

"We are taking advantage of every opportunity available to promote eHealth in Utah," said Dr. David N. Sundwall, executive director, UDOH. "The health field needs to catch up when it comes to exchanging information electronically, and developing sound, uniform practices for preserving the privacy and security of health information is a prerequisite for moving eHealth forward."

Utah was among 34 states awarded subcontracts in the Health Information Security and Privacy Collaboration under a Research Triangle Institute (RTI)-National Governors Association (NGA) contract with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Between now and March 2007, the UDOH will convene stakeholders throughout the health care industry in Utah to describe variations in information privacy and security practices that affect the sharing of information electronically to improve patient care.

"Compared to a paper system, sharing health information electronically is safer for patients and the gains in efficiency are expected to reduce health care costs," said Barry Nangle, director, Center for Health Data, UDOH.

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For example, Nangle said that each day in Utah, doctors see nearly 2,000 patients in hospital emergency departments. Emergency department doctors need information on patient medications, allergies and disease history. Getting the information from a patient's doctor quickly and efficiently would literally save lives in many cases. But in order for this to happen, doctors, hospitals, health plans and others in the state will need to agree on secure and uniform practices for exchanging information electronically.

Each state involved in the collaboration will submit reports to RTI on policies within the state that are either barriers to electronic health information exchange or best practices that facilitate secure exchange of health information.

Governor Jon M. Huntsman Jr. designated the UDOH as the lead agency in the NGA-sponsored project. The public-private sector steering committee for the Utah project will be the Utah Digital Health Services Commission, whose members are appointed by the Governor. Leading the stakeholder discussions will be HealthInsight, a non-profit quality improvement organization.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.